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INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN CHURCHES.

To many this subject seems of too little importance to furnish a reason for any decided stand on the part of Christians. Perhaps the following considerations may induce them to think differently.

(1) The simplicity and freedom from extraneous attractions which have equally characterised the worship of the primitive church and of the Presbyterian churches which have sprung from the Protestant Reformation, may not have been without its effect in promoting their success in converting men to Christ; and in the case of the latter churches, has no doubt contributed to their comparative exemption from the danger of falling into ritualism and Romanism. Why should we wilfully leave this vantage ground of primitive simplicity of worship? Spurgeon has well said on this—"We have had nothing novel to attract this multitude, nothing by way of gorgeous ceremony, not even the swell of the organ. The preaching of the Gospel is enough to draw the people and enough to save the people, and if we take to anything else we lose our power and shear away the locks which make us strong."

(2) The introduction of instrumental music is proved by experience to tend to the decay of congregational singing, and to the introduction of many kinds of musical performances not tending to spiritual edification, but more akin to the mission of the opera house than to that of the church of Christ. It has hence led to differences of opinion and to contention; so that the organ may truly be said to have been an instrument not of harmony but of discord.

(3) The introduction of instrumental music leads to confusion of ideas as to the applicability of the temple service of the Jewish church to the Christian church, a principle which if once admitted opens the way to every species of ritualism. In connection with this we find the advocates of instrumental music speaking of a service or ministry of song, of which there is no mention in the New Testament—praise in the Christian church being the spontaneous and united offering of the whole Christian people, and the harmony of voices being merely a means to this end. It is to be observed that though instruments of music were used in the Temple ritual by Priests and Levites, they were not introduced into the Synagogue worship, which more nearly corresponds with that of the New Testament. We have no right therefore to cite the Jewish precedent, unless we adopt also the sacrificing priesthood; and if we do this we go over at once to Rome. It is further to be observed that all this has nothing to do with what has been called "singing the Gospel." This

requires no organ, nor is it restricted to gifted men like Sankey and Phillips. It is daily done by very little children without any instruments—"out of the mouths of babes and sucklings"—as it was long ago; and that, as our Lord himself testified, perfectly.

(4) Attempts are made to vindicate the introduction of instrumental music by the still more mischievous doctrine that this is necessary to attract young and worldly people to the church by ministering to their sensuous tastes. This is directly contrary to the teaching and practice of Christ and His Apostles; to the conduct of our reforming forefathers, who left the magnificent ritual of Rome for the simplicity of the Gospel; and to all experience of human nature, which shews that such meretricious attractions are fatal to the true prosperity of the church, and tend to delude unwary souls into a belief that they are worshipping God when they are merely gratifying their own senses; while these petty attempts to attract the thoughtless, disgust and repel from religion the more earnest and practical class of minds.

(5) The introduction of instrumental music is a waste of the means at the disposal of the church for the promotion of the truth, and should on this ground be condemned by every thoughtful Christian. The sum invested in a single city church organ, is often sufficient to support one or two missionaries to the heathen or to the neglected districts of our own country. Viewed in this way, and in the light of the previous statements, the sound of the organ should be to the ear of the Christian nothing less than the dirge of lost souls.

(6) The case of those who have always been accustomed to the use of instrumental music and other so-called aids to devotion, is different from that of those whose predecessors had emancipated themselves from such elements of the world, and who afterwards return to them. The latter are in every way less excusable than the former.

(7) It is held by some that in "non-essential" matters of this kind, when a majority is in favour of a change, the minority should submit. It is clear, however, that this cannot be correct, otherwise a numerical majority could always override the truth, and it would become a duty rather than a crime to follow the multitude in downward ways. The minority may submit if they can reconcile it with conscience and principle to acquiesce in the innovation, but they ought to retire if they cannot, in consistency with their felt duty to Christ, do so.

(8) In the case of a majority determining to introduce any innovation of the kind above referred to, the position of such majority

and of those who adhere to them, may involve a terrible responsibility altogether disproportioned to the importance of the question at issue. If they should be in the wrong, or influenced by motives of ostentation and worldly conformity, how can they answer to Christ for introducing the seeds of evil and dissension among His people. If they think they are right, there is a still higher law; for if in the pursuit of what is confessedly not necessary even to the external worship of the Church, they offend the weakest of their brethren, they thereby expose themselves and the congregation which they represent to that solemn denunciation of our Lord—"Woe to that man through whom the offence cometh"; and they cannot expect any blessing from God until they repent and make amends for the evil they have done.

(9) Though it is true that in recent times Assemblies and Synods of Presbyterian churches have agreed to tolerate the use of instrumental music, it is to be feared that they have done so rather from a weak desire to preserve outward unity than from regard to any principle. The larger catechism of the Westminster divines holds that the second commandment forbids "devising, counselling, commanding, using, and any wise approving any religious worship not instituted by God himself," on the ground of "custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretence soever." It might relieve the minds of some who profess to adhere to the Westminster standards, if information could be given as to how and where God has 'instituted' the use of the organ in Christian worship. Let it be observed also that it is in relation to this very commandment that we blame the Church of Rome for the introduction of images and pictures, which may also be held to gratify taste and promote worship.

(10) It may be held that there is express testimony in the New Testament against mechanical aids in praise. Not only are these not referred to as in use, but no mention is made of them except in the symbolic language of the Revelation. Farther, the word *Psallo*, which might be supposed literally to refer to playing on a stringed instrument, and if taken in this very literal sense might be supposed to permit the use of stringed instruments as an accompaniment to the voice, is used in connections which show that it means something quite different, namely, the melody of the inner spiritual man, and is properly so translated in our version. For example, this word occurs in the expression:—"I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also," 1 Cor. xiv. 15.—"Singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord," Eph. v. 19. The same sense applies to the only other passages in which it is used—Rom. xv. 9; Jas. v. 13—so that it may truly be said that the only

instruments sanctioned in the Christian church are the spirit, the understanding and the heart, in all of which we are enjoined to make melody, at the same time that we give praise with the voice.

In accordance with this, no one seems to have thought of introducing organs into churches till the dark ages had introduced many other innovations. So late as 1250, Thomas Aquinas could write with reference to the Latin church: "Our church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not appear to Judaize." "Nor ought a pipe, nor any other artificial instrument, such as organ or harp or the like, be brought into use in the Christian church, but only those things which shall make of the hearers better men. For by musical instruments the mind is more directed to amusement than to the forming of a good internal disposition." He goes on to say that he thinks instruments were permitted to the Jews because they were "harder and more carnal," and for similar reasons. It is curious that Luther, Calvin, and Knox condemned the organ on much the same grounds with Aquinas; so that here for once the highest authorities both in the Protestant and Romish churches agree with one another and with the Apostles and early Christians.

Lastly, it is admitted that the subject of these remarks is one on which Christian people may conscientiously differ; but let none think that it is indifferent or unimportant. It is one of those small things which have large and important issues for good or evil to the souls of men; especially in these days of Rome-ward and ritualistic tendencies. Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind, and let no one be deterred by unworthy motives or by mere expediency from taking his stand on the side of adherence to the truth, even in the smallest matters, while retaining all charity and consideration for those who may differ. Farther, let no worldly or careless man excuse himself for rejecting Christ because of these little follies on the part of professed Christians. In no word or deed did the blessed Saviour who died for us countenance any ritualisms or mechanical aids to devotion, or ask from us anything less or more than the devotion of the heart and life to God. Jesus Christ is as little responsible for the praising machines of our churches as for the praying machines of Thibet.

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